



## **NEWS FROM NOAA**

**NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

---

Contact: Shelley Dawicki  
508 495-2378  
George Liles  
508-495-2267

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
July 8, 2008  
NR08.16

### **“Meet the Seals” at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium July 12**

#### ***Larger, Upgraded Seal Habitat Reopens with New Residents***

After a winter and spring of construction, the new seal pool and upgraded accommodations at the NOAA Fisheries Service Woods Hole Science Aquarium is complete and will be celebrated with a “Meet the Seals” event on Saturday, July 12. The event will include art activities for children and a brief ceremony to introduce the new residents.

The project began in September 2007 with demolition of the 1960s-era seal pool and construction on the same site of a larger, more naturalistic habitat that provides permanent accommodations for two or three seals. In the 1990s the Woods Hole Science Aquarium began providing permanent homes for stranded seals that cannot be re-released to the wild after rehabilitation.

“The new habitat is much more natural looking and has a variety of water depths and dry places for the seals to haul out to rest,” said Rachel Metz-Leland, senior aquarist at the Aquarium and lead seal handler. “The new pool is more than four times the size of the old one, so the seals have much more swimming space. The old pool held 4,000 gallons of water, the new one about 17,000 gallons.”

Two seals will be in the new pool this summer, the returning Luseal and a new resident found stranded on a Long Island beach in July 2007, whose name will be announced at the event. Aquarium visitors have been voting for the name from five finalists.

The new seal, believed to have been injured in a shark attack, was initially rehabilitated at the Riverhead Foundation for Marine Research and Preservation in New York. The year-old male seal was moved in early May to the Woods Hole Science Aquarium, where he has continued medical treatment and been acclimated to the new surroundings.

The project also included installing a state-of-the-art water handling system with ozone, a protein skimmer, bio-tower, sand filter and a chiller. There are also specialized husbandry facilities – a kitchen and seal food prep area, and a holding area for seals that are taken off exhibit.

Although the seal pool is complete, a few aspects of the project remain to be completed this summer. There will be a shade sail to provide animals and guests relief from the sun, a small cedar shingle outbuilding to store specialized equipment and enrichment items for the seals, a new sound system for programs, and some new educational signage.

“Since research, education and conservation, especially with seals and turtles, are the aquarium’s focus, we are thrilled to have these new facilities,” Metz-Leland said. “There is improved safety and security for the animals during closed hours. When we are open, visitors will have an improved viewing area, which has been landscaped and secured with fencing to be decorated with fish art.”

In addition to federal funds, the project received support from donations made by the public, local residents and businesses between 2001 and 2005, the largest of which was a grant from the Edward Bangs Kelley and Elza Kelley Foundation in 2002. The Kelley Foundation is a Cape Cod-based organization that supports projects that promote the health and welfare of inhabitants of Barnstable County.

The public aquarium has been part of the federal fisheries laboratory in Woods Hole since 1885, when the first permanent marine science laboratory was completed on Water Street after moving from original facilities established in 1871 on nearby Little Harbor. The Woods Hole Science Aquarium is the oldest continuously operating research aquarium in the United States, welcoming approximately 100,000 visitors a year.

Since 2000, NOAA and the neighboring Marine Biological Laboratory have worked to jointly develop programs at the aquarium that increase public interest in, and understanding of, marine science and the marine environment. Exhibits provide information about animals, research, and resource management. Animals are from waters off the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast U.S. states.

Summer hours at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium June through August are Tuesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. It is closed Sunday and Monday and on federal holidays. Admission is free, but donations are accepted.

# # #

Visit us on the web:

Woods Hole Science Aquarium: <http://aquarium.nefsc.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

Riverhead Foundation: <http://www.riverheadfoundation.org>